



The Honorable Mitch McConnell

Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi

Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer

Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy

House Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

3 June 2020

RE: Leading Organizations and Child Sexual Abuse Survivors Call for Significant FY2020 Emergency Supplemental Funding for Child Safety and Protection Programs in the Next COVID-19 Relief Package

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leaders McConnell, Schumer, and McCarthy,

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a devastating impact across the world. Efforts to contain the coronavirus are vital to the health of the world's population, but they are also exposing children, adolescents, and women to increased risk of violence. As survivors of abuse in childhood ourselves, and as leading organizations working to prevent and respond to abuse in childhood, we know that child abuse was already rampant before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and that children are at risk for child abuse at home and in their neighborhoods; a third of abusers are close family members, and over 80% are known to the child.¹

With the onset of the pandemic, the risk of abuse in the home and online is increasing significantly. We are supportive of the efforts of many organizations and individuals to ensure that the response to COVID-19 also ensures the safety of women. Our hope with this letter is to call attention to the specific issues faced by children. **For both women and children, staying safe should go beyond protecting people from the coronavirus and must include preventing all forms of domestic violence and child abuse, including child sexual abuse and exploitation.**

¹ <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/perpetrators-sexual-violence>



Many children are now hidden from an army of caring adults, community members and mandated reporters who would have protected them: friends, neighbors, family members, teachers, doctors, dentists, and even child protective service professionals. As families struggle with disruptions in routine, isolation from society, financial insecurity, stress, and anxiety, the risk of child abuse in all its forms is on the rise—particularly for children already living in vulnerable situations. Millions of children now lack access to the safe spaces, services, and people that schools provide. Moreover, many states have sidelined child protective service workers and have failed to provide personal protective equipment to ensure our child welfare professionals can be in contact with our most at-risk youth.

With the onset of the U.S. stay-at-home order response to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, states are reporting a significant decrease in expected child abuse reports as compared to last year², while at the same time there is an increase of reported abuse-related childhood injuries requiring hospitalization.^{3 4} There is also an increase in reports by children themselves to hotlines.⁵ **In a world without doctors, teachers, child protective services, and advocates to identify and report abuse, only the most severe cases are surfacing--and severe abuse is on the rise.**

In addition, large numbers of children are spending unprecedeted time online. While online communities have become central to learning, support and play for children, they also increase exposure to online violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse. There has been a marked increase in reports of online exploitation of children since the pandemic began.⁶ This increase may stem from a variety of factors, but we know that COVID is exacerbating the already urgent issue of online child sexual exploitation.

Many children are not in contact with any mandated reporters, including their teachers, because they lack computers and/or adequate WiFi. These children need to be educated, but this equipment could also provide a much-needed link to the outside world for those children who need it. We need to ensure children have access to the equipment and services necessary to be online, while at the same time ensuring their safety.

Given the severity of the issues presented, **we call on Congress to invest at least \$300 million in emergency funding to strengthen child safety and protection programs in the next COVID-19 Relief Package.** In addition, we join together with the large coalition of child welfare advocates in calling for *significant funding* increases for Child Abuse Prevention Treatment Act (CAPTA) State and Prevention grants and other child abuse prevention and intervention programs within the Department of Health and Human Services.

²<https://www.nbcphiladelphia.com/news/coronavirus/calls-to-pa-child-safety-line-down-60-worrying-advocates/2388769/?fbclid=IwAR00AyygMUfEPN-vC7SQ-FzrClfxPC1v5aOdhLo0Qzw5CIdOpztFcpNJJ04>

³<https://dfw.cbslocal.com/2020/03/20/texas-hospital-spike-severe-child-abuse-cases-coronavirus/>

⁴https://foxsanantonio.com/news/nation-world/with-no-school-calls-drop-but-child-abuse-hasnt-amid-virus-04-18-2020/?fbclid=IwAR0GKltSxCy7QbeVjC0a08JPdyZhv6YUAcQIxt9Z_3qGOTmFos1u6TGHQ

⁵https://www.rainn.org/news/first-time-ever-minors-make-half-visitors-national-sexual-assault-hotline?fbclid=IwAR2kzDtVQBzN1Yo0qVyMcYHYwQs7Pp6M_jdiiutUKIG7xrXvbWTv718lxjQ

⁶<https://www.forbes.com/sites/thomasbrewster/2020/04/24/child-exploitation-complaints-rise-106-to-hit-2-million-in-just-one-month-is-covid-19-to-blame/#37b874f74c9c>

We believe that a broader response to COVID-19 *must* include comprehensive protections from violence for children and adolescents, and *must* include additional resources to reinforce and expand current programs that not only prevent child abuse and exploitation and protect vulnerable children, but also provide trauma-informed care and services that help abused children heal and seek justice.

For example, federal programs that fund victim-focused children's advocacy centers and domestic violence shelters provide funds that help families seek justice and heal. Prevention programs such as CHILD USA, Darkness to Light, Family Justice Centers, and other Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention programs funded through CAPTA work together with families and communities in hopes of preventing the abuse from happening in the first place. In addition, federal, state and local organizations and law enforcement task forces play a critical role in combating child sexual abuse and exploitation online.

These programs are needed now more than ever, thus we urge Congress to provide at least \$300 million in emergency funds to child safety programs within the Departments of Justice (DOJ), Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education (DoE) so that States, local governments, and non-governmental organizations can build and expand on the services they are already providing children that have been abused, or are at risk. It is critical that these programs remain fully funded, and have additional resources to handle the likely increased need for services due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We call on you to:

- Expand funding to ensure continuity of essential health and social welfare services, including mental health and psychosocial support—by providing professionals with the personal protection equipment (PPE) and online technology needed to continue working.
- Expand funding for additional psychologists, social workers, and counselors to help children and adolescents who are experiencing COVID-19 related trauma and expand funding for existing crisis support hotlines to meet increased demand.
- Expand funding to train educators and teachers, frontline health workers, and truancy officers on the best practices for identifying child abuse and exploitation while interacting with families through online learning and/or telemedicine visits. The program must adapt and incorporate safety modules into on-line schooling and telemedicine visits.
- Expand funding for underprivileged children to receive computers and WiFi access as part of their educational and safety needs, and ensure that all computers, tablets and laptops issued are equipped with online safety programs to block harmful content and establish safety standards.
- Expand funding to federal, state, and local law enforcement and other relevant programs to curb the rise in child sexual exploitation and abuse online.
- Expand funding to address the heightened risk of online harm, by ensuring safe networks for children, such as those utilized at schools, therefore maximizing online safety and eliminating access to dangerous sites and protecting children from online predators.
- Require states that receive funding to implement a child abuse reporting functions (chat, email, text or other means) into their state and local online learning platforms to enable children and adolescents to report abuse directly to their states child abuse hotline, and ensure children and adolescents are aware of these platforms.

- Expand requirements and encourage voluntary and proactive efforts for technology and communications to increase detection and take action to stop harmful activity against children online, including grooming and the creation and distribution of child sexual abuse images and videos.
- Expand public education and awareness campaigns on domestic violence and child abuse, including prevention, ways to identify warning signs of potential violence at home, how to access services, and how a neighbor or friend can assist someone experiencing abuse—including in education and food security efforts, in both rural and urban communities.
- Expand existing funding to grass-roots organizations at the front-lines of protecting children for programs that target diverse ethnic and religious communities, in multiple languages, and that provide trauma-informed care for survivors and support for professionals who work to protect children.
- Expand public education and awareness on hotlines and other services available to women, children and adolescents who may experience violence, including those living in areas under movement restrictions, under quarantine, or those infected with COVID-19.
- Invest in new systems to identify, prevent and report child abuse, including expanded efforts to establish online filing of restraining orders and a one-number federal hotline that will provide the information needed to callers regarding child protection services in each state and at the federal level.
- Expanded funding for resources that support people concerned about their own thoughts or behaviors and seeking help to live safe, offense-free lives, focusing on both prevention and response.

As a united front of adult survivors of child sexual abuse and exploitation and national leaders in the fight against child abuse and neglect, we welcome the opportunity to work with you and your staff on these very important and timely issues. **The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted serious problems for children at home and underprivileged children. We should not lose this opportunity to make the world safer for children.**

Should questions arise, if you need additional information, or if you or your staff would like to meet with members of this movement, to discuss these issues, please contact Denise Edwards at National Children's Alliance: dedwards@nca-online.org or Paul Zeitz at Together for Girls: at drpaulzeitz@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Teresa Huizar
Executive Director, National Children's Alliance

Dr. Daniela Ligiero
Survivor and CEO, Together for Girls

Marci Hamilton
CEO, Child USA

Karen Baker
CEO, Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape

Katelyn Brewer
President and CEO, Darkness to Light

Dr. Gary Barker
President and CEO, Promundo-US

Donna Bartos
Founder and CEO, BLOOM365

Dr. Shira Berkovits, Esq.
President and CEO, Sacred Spaces

Scott Berkowitz
President, RAINN

Karen Carolonza
Board Member, Together for Girls

Maya Mintz Coccoluto
Founder and Creative Director, SASH

Gary M. Cohen
Founder and Board Chair, Together for Girls

Jenny Coleman
Director, Stop it Now!

Julie Cordua
CEO, Thorn

Linda Crockett
Survivor, Founder and Director, Safe Communities

Dr. Angela Diaz
Director, Mt. Sinai Adolescent Health Center

Brisa de Angulo
Survivor and CEO, Breeze of Hope Foundation

Rebekah Dopp,
Chair, The Child Abuse Prevention Program, NY

Dr. Denise Dunning
Founder and Executive Director, Rise Up

Dr. Mary Ellsberg
Director, Global Women's Institute, George Washington University

Dr. Jane Fleishman
Curriculum Coordinator, SASH

Dr. Howard Fradkin
Survivor and Independent Consulting Trauma Psychologist

Grace French
Founder and President, The Army of Survivors

Dr. Jennifer J. Freyd
Founder and President, Center for Institutional Courage

Yasmeen Hassan
Global Executive Director, Equality Now

Dr. Lyndon Haviland
Chair, Foundation Board, CUNY School of Public Health

Zach Hiner
Executive Director, SNAP Network

Sharon Hirsch
President and CEO, Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina

Tania Cluver Humphrey
Survivor, Artist and Activist

Linda E. Johnson
Executive Director, Prevent Child Abuse Vermont

Dr. Dana Kaplan
Physician, Child Abuse Pediatrics, Northwell Health

Shari Karney, Esq.
Survivor and Founder, ROAR As One

Eileen King
Executive Director and Program Director, Child Justice

Dr. Felicia Knaul

Professor, Department of Public Health Sciences at the Miller School of Medicine, University of Miami

Lynn Layton

CEO, The Monique Burr Foundation for the Protection of Children

Bruce Lesley

President, First Focus Campaign for Children

Dr. Elizabeth Letourneau

Director, Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse, Johns Hopkins University

Rachel Lloyd, CMG

Founder and CEO, Girls Educational & Mentoring Services

Samier Mansur

Founder and CEO, No Limit Generation

Dr. Melissa Merrick

President and CEO, Prevent Child Abuse America

Erin Merryn

Survivor and Founder, Erin's Law

Sandi Capuano Morrison, M.A.

CEO, Institute on Violence, Abuse and Trauma

Tabitha Mpamira

Survivor, Founder and Director of EDJA Program, Nyaka Global

Amanda Nguyen

CEO and Founder, Rise

Colleen Oliver

CEO, Committee for Children

Dr. Pamela J. Pine

Founding CEO, Stop the Silence, Stop CSA

Dr. Mary Pulido

Executive Director, New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

Dr. Anita Raj

Director, Center on Gender Equity and Health, Univ. of California San Diego School of Medicine

Dr. Anthony P. Rizzuto

President and Founder, Abuse Prevention Solutions, LLC

Dr. Janet Rosenzweig

Executive Director, The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children

Dr. Joanna Rubinstein

President and CEO, World Childhood Foundation USA

Dr. Joyanna Silberg

Executive Vice President, Leadership Council on Child Abuse & Interpersonal Violence

Dr. Jay Silverman

Professor of Medicine and Global Public Health, Univ. of California San Diego School of Medicine

Dr. Cathi Sitzman

Psychologist and Trauma Specialist, Washington, D.C.

Janti Soeripto

CEO, Save the Children

Alexandra Tillinghast

Founder and President, Thriving Not Surviving

David Ulich
President, Global Sports Development

Mark Joseph Williams
Special Advisor, Archdiocese of Newark

Dr. Paul Zeitz
Survivor and Executive Director, Build A
Movement 2020

Ariel Zwang
CEO, Safe Horizon